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A Note from the Conference Minister

A Post-Christmas Reflection

Dear Friends,

In this late January moment, my mind turns to the words of W.H. Auden from "For the Time Being":

> Well, so that is that. Now we must dismantle the tree,
>
> Putting the decorations back into their cardboard boxes—
>
> Some have got broken—and carrying them up to the attic.
>
> The holly and the mistletoe must be taken down and burnt,
>
> And the children got ready for school. There are enough
>
> Left-overs to do warmed up, for the rest of the week.

The magic that touched our souls by the manager side now fades, or must it? Can it live through the chill of winter, the warmth of the promise fulfilled by the words "unto us a child is born; unto us, a son is give," sustaining us until spring breaks forth? But then there are Auden's words in the chorus of the same oratorio:

> He is the way.
>
> Follow Him through the Land of Unlikeness;
>
> You will see rare beasts, and have unique adventures.
>
> He is the Truth.
>
> Seek Him in the Kingdom of Anxiety;
>
> You will come to a great city that has expected your return for years.
>
> He is the Life.
>
> Love Him in the World of Flesh;
>
> And at your marriage all its occasions shall dance for joy.

In the Epiphany journey I pause to marvel at my own life of "unique adventures" and "rare beasts," the city "that has expected my return for years," and at the opportunities to "dance for joy." My prayer for you and for us all is that you may marvel at the God who has come "and shared our common lot..." and now walks this journey with us.

Peace to you,

Tim Downs

Conference Minister

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Featured Highlight

Rev. Dr. Geoffry Black Visits SEC

United Church of Christ President Continues Listening Tour With Stop in Atlanta – Feb. 5-7.

Rev. Geoffrey Black, of the United Church of Christ continues ten stop national listening tour visiting UCC conferences around the U.S. Next on agenda is the Southeast Conference beginning in Pleasant Hill, TN and then Atlanta and Stone Mountain, GA.

The recently elected General Minister and President, Rev. Geoffrey Black, of the United Church of Christ (UCC) continues a ten stop national listening tour visiting UCC conferences around the United States. Next on his agenda is the Southeast Conference (SEC), made up of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, and the panhandle of Florida. The Rev. Black's southeast tour will begin in Pleasant Hill, TN and continue on to Atlanta, GA and Stone Mountain, GA. The Rev. Black has taken to the road in an effort to hear first-hand from the diverse groups across the UCC.

The United Church of Christ elected Rev. Geoffrey A. Black General Minister and President in June of 2009. Prior to that, he served as Conference Minister of the UCC's New York Conference for nine years. He also served as the pastor of local congregations, a university chaplain, and was on the staff of the UCC Office for Church Life and Leadership. He is a graduate of Lincoln University and Yale Divinity School. His ecumenical commitment, concern for equal justice, African-American empowerment, and community improvement have shaped Black's ministry in the church and in the communities in which he has lived.

During recent listening tours, Rev. Black emphasized the theme of open communications by asking, "How is God calling us to better shape the United Church of Christ with an expectation that God's spirit is moving among us?" Black comes to the Southeast Conference eager to hear what its people have to say.

The geographically dispersed SEC is rich in transformation and innovation. "The Southeast Conference is the mission field for the church, a unique area with greatest possibility for growth," states Rev. Timothy Downs, SEC Conference Minister. The conference strives to stay in front and remain connected with its five states via new emerging technology.

Center for Progressive Renewal (CPR). The Rev. Black will serve on the advisory board for the Center. One of the Center's co-directors is the Rev. Cameron Trimble, currently an Associate Conference Minister for the Southeast Conference, who was recently named CEO and Executive Director of CPR. The Center will serve existing and future UCC congregations. It will be an independent, non-profit organization. "This ... gives us the means to build partnerships with other denominations. The center will return to a proven strategy: that healthy congregations give birth to new congregations," states Trimble.
On deepening ecumenical partnerships the Rev. Black has commented, "You've heard that 'necessity is the mother of invention'? Necessity may also be the mother of ecumenical partnership. Most of our ecumenical partners ... are facing the same kind of challenges as we are in the UCC." Churches today are looking at hard times. The UCC is striving to be faithful to God's call in economically

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challenging times, when the numbers of members in mainline denominations are continuing to decrease. "There is definitely a need for a church like ours. We are a small denomination but we are an important voice in the life of this country. I am a firm believer that this church has a future. We just need to reach out and take hold of it," states Rev. Black.

The schedule for Rev. Black's stay in the Southeast Conference is as follows:

• Friday, February 5th / 5:00pm Pleasant Hill Community UCC, Pleasant Hill, TN
Pleasant Hill Community will host a potluck dinner in Rev. Black's honor. The dinner and following meeting will be open to all area UCC members.

• Saturday, February 6th
Atlanta, GA Rev. Black will meet with some of the SEC key leaders who are deeply involved in its educational ministries and extension work through new church starts.

• Sunday, February 7th / 8:30am
Victory Church, UCC, Stone Mountain, GA
Rev. Black will bring greetings to Victory at their early service.

• Sunday, February 7th / 10:00am
First Congregational UCC, Atlanta, GA Join us in worship as the Rev. Black preaches the Sunday sermon.

• Sunday, February 7th / 2:00pm
Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta, GA
Rev. Black will host a Listening Session, open to the public to respond to questions and concerns of members of the United Church of Christ from across the conference.

Haiti Earthquake Appeal

Donate Now to Provide Emergency Relief in Haiti. The United Church of Christ has launched an emergency appeal for Haiti after a major earthquake struck the country. Thousands of people are feared dead and countless have been left homeless.

Global Ministries personnel, **Kim, Patrick** and **Solomon Bentrott** have reported in they are safe. As damage assessments are made and plans for relief, recovery and rehabilitation are developed, additional support will be shared. The need is massive. Updates will be posted at:

http://www.ucc.org/disaster/

The quake, measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale, struck 10 miles southwest of the capital just before 5pm local time on January 12.

It is still too early to know the full extent of the damage, but **One Great Hour of Sharing** is expecting very high loss of life, widespread destruction of homes, schools and other buildings, and major damage to key water, electricity and road systems.

One Great Hour of Sharing funds are being rushed to our Haitian partners to support their initial emergency response. As damage assessments are made and plans for relief, recovery and rehabilitation are developed, additional support will be shared. The need is massive.

How You Can Help:

1. Pray for the people of Haiti their leaders and emergency and humanitarian aid workers.

2. Please help the people of Haiti by sending gifts payable to your congregation marked for "OGHS - Haiti Earthquake Relief" with the request they be sent

through your Conference office on to Wider Church Ministries.

3. Send gifts, made out to Wider Church Ministries and marked in the memo portion "OGHS - Haiti Earthquake Relief" to Wider Church Ministries; 700 Prospect Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44115.

OR

Make a secure online donation to the OGHS International Disaster Relief fund.<**https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Donation2?df_id=1234&1234.donation=form1**>

Thank you for your compassion and support.

Peace,

Susan

Susan M. Sanders

United Church of Christ

Minister for Global Sharing of Resources One Great Hour of Sharing Administrator 216-736-3210
sanderss@ucc.org<mailto:sanderss@ucc.org>

www.ucc.org/oghs<http://www.ucc.org/oghs>

Six Churches from the Southeast Conference join in a work camp at Back Bay Mission, Biloxi

Twenty-six individuals from six UCC churches in the Southeast Conference gathered in Biloxi, Mississippi in November to experience and share God's love. The team rehabbed homes, cooked and served at Loaves and Fishes soup kitchen, distributed food and clothing at the Mission office, and helped Back Bay prepare & wrap Christmas gift items for the homeless and other needy men, women, and children on the Gulf Coast. Members of the group marveled at the sense of community that could bind together such a diverse group. Led by Connie and Bob Waidmann, Disaster Relief Coordinators for the Southeast Conference, the work camp was an expression of the DART (Disaster Assistance Relief Team) Ministries of the Conference.

Robert Ahrendt of Pleasant Hill wrote, "Often through the years people have asked - How can you believe in a God you cannot see? Well, I know we saw what God looks like on the week of work camp. God looks like the 26 people from different age, ethnic, racial, educational, talent and skill level, sexual orientation, interest, financial levels and religious backgrounds that were part of this weeklong work camp. God's hands look like blisters and paint, broken fingernails, other body parts bruised and all over-exhausted."

Some of the group worked on the home of an elderly couple in hopes of getting them back into it before Christmas. Several other homes were brought closer to completion. One of these is for an elderly woman who fishes with a net each day to give food to her neighbors and the other for a single mother of three children. It was a joy to meet and talk with the residents of the homes where the group worked. They shared their love and gratitude with members of our conference in many ways.

Other work camp activities included Wednesday night worship at a neighborhood Missionary Baptist church, a tour of the devastation and rebuilding in New Orleans, and fun evenings of cards and conversation.

Team members were from around the Conference. Churches from Atlanta included **First Congregational United Church of Christ, Open Community Church UCC, and Praxis UCC, all in the Atlanta area**. Churches from Tennessee included **Church of the Savior UCC, Knoxville; Holy Trinity Community UCC, Nashville; and Pleasant Hill Community Church UCC, Pleasant Hill.**

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Around the Conference

Pleasant Hill Community UCC has been in an extended period of discernment concerning the expansion of their facilities to accommodate the growth in attendance and membership, which they have been experiencing. They have entered conversations with an architectural firm, and are looking ahead to the possibility of a capital campaign stay tuned!

On December 20th at 6:00P, **Community Congregational UCC**, Montgomery, Alabama, opened its doors to host a Christmas season ecumenical worship service with other congregations from the city. They welcomed over 200 people to the service.

On February 14th, **Pilgrimage UCC**, in Marietta, Georgia, will dedicate the renovations of their sanctuary, which they have completed. The renovations expand the size of the sanctuary, and are a part of developing more flexible space to accommodate an expanding church school and youth programming.

From January 13th through the 15th, **Conference Campaign Director Steve Havey** and **Conference Minister Tim Downs**, with Campaign Co-Chairs, **Susan Mitchell** and **Bob Watson** conducted three visitor trainings in Chattanooga, Atlanta, and Birmingham. The visitors, who will be contacting each church in the Conference over the next two weeks, were introduced to the congregations they will be visiting, and the strategies for strengthening giving not only to the conference but also to each local church through campaigns in the life of each congregation. Following the visits with the churches, there will workshops conducted across to conference to equip churches to be effective in telling their story, and sharing the story of the dynamic ministries of the conference.

Thank you to **Beloved Community UCC, Birmingham, Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga**, and **Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta** for opening their doors to the 40-60 visitors being trained to do the visiting for the Campaign to Expand the Mission and Ministries of the Conference.

After three years of affiliation with the United Church of Christ, and a time during which they have been the most rapidly growing congregation in the Conference, **Holy Trinity Community Church, UCC**, is about to assume their own mortgage, taking it over from the Conference. The initial mortgage from the UCC Church Building and Loan Fund was granted to the Southeast Conference, which assumed the risk and responsibility for a congregation, which was newly affiliated with the UCC. This next step represents an acknowledgement of the strength and vitality of the church's ministry. The Conference has been proud to be a partner to make this possible.

On October 17, 2009 at **Brookmeade Congregational UCC**, with 75 in attendance, Upper Room Fellowship celebrated its 5th Anniversary. It was a gathering of all four of Nashville area's UCC churches for a potluck supper. Cameron Trimble, Associate Conference Minister for Southeast Conference, was the speaker and a performance by the inspirational vocal duo from Houston: Jason & DeMarco!

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Conference News and Announcements

Geoffrey Black, the newly elected General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, is in the midst of a ten-conference tour of the whole church, with intent to listen to the concerns and priorities of its people. He will be with us in the Southeast Conference from February 5th through the 7th. Beginning with a 5:00 potluck dinner at the **Pleasant Hill Community UCC, TN**, on Friday the 5th, his visit will continue with two stops in Atlanta on Saturday, the 6th with leaders from the TAP program and others from our new church starts. On Sunday Rev. Black will bring greetings to **Victory Church (UCC)** in Stone Mountain, GA, at their early service, preach at **First Congregational UCC, Atlanta a**t their 11:00 service, and then will hold a conference-wide listening session at Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta at 2:00 Sunday afternoon. This is an invitation to all clergy and lay folk of the Southeast Conference to join us at 2:00 on Sunday, February 7th at **Central Congregational UCC**. We hope you will be with us. There will be refreshments and hospitality.

Southeast Conference Anticipates Staff Changes in January

The writer of Ecclesiastes notes, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven." In the life of the Southeast Conference, we are preparing for a transition in staffing to prepare us for the next season in our life together. Over the first six months of 2010, **Cameron Trimble,** Associate Conference Minister for Church Development, will transition into her new position as Executive Director of the Center for Progressive Renewal. Cameron has been the vision and engine that has driven our new church development for the last four years. The vision for this Center took shape within the Southeast Conference, which will continue as a partner in support of it along side of Local Church Ministries of the UCC, and Hope for Peace and Justice. The Center will be located in the Southeast Conference offices, and in addition to equipping the new and renewing church strategies for the Southeast Conference, will continue to generate the new church strategies for the UCC.

Another significant change is that **Kathy Clark**, who has served as Associate Conference Minister and Director of the TAP program will have a new job description and title. She will become Associate Conference Minister for Ministry Formation and Leadership Development. In that capacity, Kathy will continue to direct the TAP Program, but she will also have oversight of the process of discernment in preparation for ministry of all candidates of the Southeast Conference for authorized ministry in the UCC. Each of these changes reflects the clearer focus of the ministries of the Conference on leadership development and the vitality of our congregations. It is our hope that these changes will enable those in our pews and pulpits to experience our presence in new and more dynamic ways.

Conference Closed Books January 15th, and Continues to Offer

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Mission Interpretation Materials to Churches

The 2009 books for the Southeast Conference were closed on **January 15th**, and all contributions received after have been credited to 2010. A mailing to all pastors and church treasurers was sent in mid-December alerting them to this. In that mailing, there was a sample of a brochure interpreting OCWM and its uses both within the Conference and around the world. This brochure is available by emailing Gerri at **ghudson@secucc.org** and letting us know the number of copies you need. We also have a brochure interpreting the ministries of the Southeast Conference that can be used for member orientation that we will send in as many copies as you can use. This can also be ordered through Gerri.

Southeast Conference Offers UCC History and Polity Class on Line for the First Time!

We are pleased to report that after numerous expressions of interest, the Southeast Conference is offering a three-credit seminary class in collaboration with Candler School of Theology online beginning on March 6 and ending on May 8th. While the course is available for credit, it can be audited for $300.00 and will fulfill the history and polity requirement for clergy seeking privilege of call, ordained ministerial standing, and for Students in Care/Members in Discernment. The registration will be available on the Southeast Conference web site mid-January, but if you are interested in auditing, contact Tim Downs at **tdowns@secucc.org** before February 15th. The class will be co-taught by Tim Downs and Kathy Clark. If you wish to take the course for credit, contact the registrar at Candler School of Theology.

Southeast Conference Partners with LCM and H4P&J to Support the Center for Progressive Renewal

In our last Leaders' Link, we announced the creation of the **Center for Progressive Renewal**, an outgrowth of the ministries of the Southeast Conference over the last five years. The Center resulted from our successful New Church Leadership Institute held each summer in Atlanta, which was held in collaboration with Local Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ. The Institute was developed by the Conference staff in collaboration with the staff of Local Church Ministries of the UCC. The Center expands the Institute from being an annual event into being a year round program for resourcing church development starting this January 2010.

There are several advantages to the creation of such a Center that is affiliated with the Local Church Ministries and the United Church of Christ, but also have its own identity and structure. The steady and rapid changes that have had an impact upon the church and culture call for such an organization built on flexibility for quick response to today's challenges.

As we face the future, the creation of this Center would provide the opportunity for the development of a diverse team of practitioners, coaches, and consultants for new church development to work with congregations and conferences with a particular focus on the Southern region of the United States from the east to the west coast.

With these consultants, several already at work in our conferences, the Center will raise up and broaden the leadership core for church development throughout the UCC. The creation of this Center will also provide the opportunity for the receiving of grants and money from funding sources that would not fund denominations. The Center sets up the possibility for increased funding for church development.

Created as a partnership among Local Church Ministries of the UCC, an organization named Hope for Peace and Justice, and the Southeast Conference of the UCC, we are modeling the kind of collaborative effort that we encourage in church development. The Center for Progressive Renewal will work ecumenically with our partners in other denominations as well. See **www.progressiverenewal.com** and **www.growtheucc.org** for further information.

East Alabama-West Georgia Association Holds Annual Christmas Party

The East Alabama-West Georgia Association Christmas Party took place at the Red Rooster Restaurant, LaGrange, Georgia, on Friday, December 4th. Thirty-three people gathered from the **Lanett Congregational Christian Church, Sandy**

Creek UCC, and **Oak Grove Christian Church UCC**, for an evening of good food, entertainment by a trio from United Church, LaGrange, and a carol sing.

Annual Meeting of the Southeast Conference to Be Held June 10-12. Circle the Dates!

We are pleased to announce that the **Annual Meeting** of the Southeast Conference will be hosted by **Church of the Savior, UCC, Knoxville, TN, June 10-12**. We are currently securing confirmations from our keynoters and preachers, but we know that this time that the highlights of the meeting will include the conclusion of our campaign to expand the ministries of the Conference, a celebration of the ministries of Cameron Trimble while she served as Associate Conference Minister for Church Development, the vitality of our TAP (Theology Among the People) program, and much more!

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Lifting Up!

We received news of **Johnny Mingus** who retired as pastor of **Pilgrim Congregational UCC**, Chattanooga, to Venice, Florida. He was recently diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease). Many will remember Johnny as the minister who collaborated with the Conference in the development of the Covenant for Renewal, the first effort at church renewal that we undertook about ten years ago. If you wish to send greetings, Johnny can be reached at 518 Sheridan Dr., Venice, FL 3429, or **huntmingus@comcast.net**.

We received news that **Dorinda Broadnax**, licensed for ministry at **Community Congregational UCC,** Montgomery lost her sister unexpectedly on New Year's Eve. We hold Dorinda and her family in our prayers in this time of unexpected grief

We received word of the death of **Dolly Derstine** following an extended struggle with cancer. Bill and Dolly have been retired at Uplands Retirement Village for some years, and Bill has served as a TAP facilitator for the Southeast Conference.

We have received partial information that the **mother of Cynthia Myers**, married to Gary Myers, pastor of Trinity Congregational UCC, Athens, AL., has passed away following a time of illness. Gary has recently served on the boards of the Southeast Conference and Wider Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ.

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We are pleased to announce that **Chris Waldron**, who has been called to serve as new church developer for **Praxis UCC**, in Atlanta, has been approved for transferring his ministerial standing from the Ohio Conference, and was married two months ago to Leah Lyman, a UCC student in care in her first year at Candler School of Theology. Leah was a UCC volunteer at Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, MS before coming to seminary.

Dr. Kenneth L Samuel has announced that he is a candidate for the Georgia House District 89. The theme of his campaign will be "engagement, education and economy" and the assurance that "no one will be left behind"... for more information visit the campaign web site: **http://kennethsamuel4ga.com/**.

Roy Bain, who has served as pastor of Lanett Congregational Christian Church for nineteen years has announced his retirement to take effect on April 4th, 2010. Roy has been a leader in the life of the Southeast Conference and the East Alabama-West Georgia Association through the years, serving as Moderator of the Conference and the Association, on numerous committees in the Association and the Conference, including recently serving as a delegate to General Synod XXVI, in Hartford, Connecticut. Roy and his wife Wanda will be living in North Alabama.

November 30th to December 2nd, Tim Downs attended a retreat for UCC Conference Ministers held at Duke Divinity School, the theme of which was exploring models of leadership. Sixteen of the 38 conference ministers were present.

If there is news that you wish to have shared with others in the Southeast Conference family, please contact Tim at tdowns@secucc.org.

Posted on January 20, 2010

Listen to the 2009 Podcasts with leaders making a difference in the UCC.

Theology Among the People

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The Nehemiah Initiative

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1330 West Peachtree Street, Suite 350, Atlanta, GA 30309
Office: 800.807.1993, Fax: 404.607.7939